

North Link

Seattle, Washington

(November 2002)

Description

Sound Transit (Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority) is planning a 24-mile Central *Link* light rail transit (LRT) line running north to south from Northgate, through downtown Seattle and Southeast Seattle to the cities of Tukwila and SeaTac, Washington. Link proposes 21 (including two deferred) stations and four (one deferred) park-and-ride lots (approximately 2,100 new spaces). The system would operate on existing and new right-of-way (ROW), including the existing 1.3-mile Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT).

Sound Transit plans to phase construction of the entire system. The first phase has been designated the Initial Segment. It constitutes 14 miles of the 24-mile LRT and will extend from Convention Place to South 154th Station. Two additional phases, known as North Link and Airport Link, will complete the 24-mile LRT line.

For the approximately eight-mile North Link segment, Sound Transit is evaluating alternatives for extending the Central Link light rail Initial Segment north from downtown Seattle to Northgate. The North Link Extension will serve the dense urban neighborhoods and employment centers of central Seattle, the University District, Roosevelt, and Northgate. The proposed corridor is highly congested, transit-supportive, and includes several of the central Puget Sound region's most densely populated urban and employment centers.

The *Link* LRT system is one element of Sound Transit's voter-approved ten year \$3.9 billion (\$1995) Sound Move regional transit plan, which also includes the implementation of a 1.6-mile LRT line in downtown Tacoma; an 82-mile Sounder commuter rail system operating between Lakewood and Everett; 19 new regional express bus routes; and 45 major capital projects including 14 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) direct access ramps (providing access to over 100 miles of existing HOV lanes), 14 new park-and-ride facilities, nine transit centers, and other service improvements.

This project has not been rated because the grantee did not submit project information for the New Starts criteria. Sound Transit is evaluating several alternatives for extending the Central Link light rail Initial Segment north from downtown to Northgate.

Status

The Sound Transit Board adopted the Sound Move regional transit plan in May 1996. Voters approved \$3.9 billion in local funding for implementation of the plan in November 1996. A Major Investment Study of *Sound Move's* services was completed in March 1997. *Sound Move* is included in the Puget Sound Regional Council's (the area's MPO) long range transportation plan and Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

FTA approved the initiation of Preliminary Engineering on the *Link* LRT in July 1997. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in December 1998. The Final EIS was completed in November 1999. FTA issued a Record of Decision in January 2000. The Sound Transit Board formally adopted a 7.2-mile initial MOS for Federal participation in November 1999. The MOS ran from NE 45th Street at the University of Washington to the maintenance base at South Lander Street in the industrial area south of downtown Seattle. Approximately 4.5 miles of this was new tunnel under Capitol Hill, Portage Bay, and the University of Washington. FTA has approved the North Link segment for Preliminary Engineering and portions of the segment for Final Design. Sound Transit will prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement, and develop Preliminary Engineering and design to support further analysis of alternatives to build North Link.

After Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Office of Inspector General (OIG) raised significant questions about project costs, the Sound Transit Board directed staff to re-examine the entire project. Staff had to determine if a portion of the 20-mile LPA could be identified as a new initial segment, or if MOS-1 could be redefined to reduce risks and better to meet budget limitations. During this re-examination, the Board maintained its commitment to build the entire alignment. In November 2001, the Sound Transit Board formally adopted the current Initial Segment from Convention Place to South 154th Station as the new MOS.

TEA-21 Section 3030(a)(85) authorizes the Seattle Sound Move Corridor (Link and Sounder), of which *Link* is one element, for Final Design and construction. Through FY 2002, Congress has appropriated \$90.97 million for the *Link* LRT. This amount includes the FY 2002 appropriation of \$49.53 million, which FTA has suspended based on recommendations from the USDOT Office of Inspector General. These funds will not be awarded until satisfactory resolution of the issues raised by the OIG and Congress.

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